

Aquatic Park Stop

#6 Creation of a National Park

Aquatic Park, the small protected cove of the San Francisco Bay on the west end of Fisherman's Wharf, was designed for recreation. In the 1930's many showed up to swim, boat, and fish on the weekends. But by the end of World War II the beach along Aquatic Park was shut down and its buildings lay vacant.

After the war, a young man named Karl Kortum, the son of a local chicken rancher, proposed that a museum be established at Aquatic Park. A museum that would celebrate the seafaring history that helped to build the city of San Francisco.

Throughout the United States working ships with notable pasts were being scrapped or abandoned to waste away to the elements.

Unlike many scrap yards out to turn a quick profit, it was Kortum's belief that, "A sailing ship, particularly the real thing, could stir the public like nothing else." His goal was to honor the contributions of real working vessels and the millions of ordinary men who lived at sea, risked their lives at sea, and died at sea, carrying out ordinary work that would change the history of the world.

Garnering support, Kortum was able to turn his ideas of a maritime museum at Aquatic Park into a reality by 1951. Several years later the museum acquired the first of its many ships the 1886 square rigger *Balclutha*. At over 300 feet long with masts 145 feet tall, it was a grand start for a collection of historic ships. Today, Kortum's idea has grown into something much larger.

In 1977 the collection of historic ships, the maritime museum, and even the 35 acres of land known as Aquatic Park came into the care of the National Park Service. Today San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park continues the work of preservation passed down from previous generations. Our parks are a legacy, and here along the San Francisco waterfront that legacy includes preserving the history and achievements of seafaring Americans for the enrichment of our present and future generations.